

Introduction

North Carolina's commercial fisheries have been subjected to a number of different management strategies over the past ten years. Many of these strategies have been implemented to avoid overexploitation, to reduce bycatch, or to reduce conflict. Management strategies implemented to avoid overexploitation have been developed for several commercially important species such as blue crabs (*Callinectes sapidus*), summer flounder (*Paralichthys dentatus*), southern flounder (*Paralichthys lethostigma*), red drum (*Sciaenops ocellatus*), hard clams (*Mercenaria mercenaria*), oysters (*Crassostrea virginica*), and numerous others (Cheuvront 2002; Diaby 2002). Additional management strategies were developed to reduce bycatch through gear restrictions and area closures, such as the measures developed to protect sea turtles in Pamlico Sound (Gearhart 2001). However, determining an effective management strategy for a commercial fishery is a difficult and complicated process (Bianchi 2002). Management strategies are often developed without a full understanding of the economic impacts they may have on a fishery's participants (NMFS 1996). This report serves as a resource for fishery managers to use when developing a fishery management plan. Providing fishery managers with information on the relative economic importance of individual fisheries will help them to evaluate the potential effects that regulations can have on a fishery's participants and the state's economy.

The Fisheries Reform Act, enacted in 1997 by the North Carolina General Assembly, requires the preparation of state-level fishery management plans by the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF) for all commercially and recreationally significant species. The Fisheries Reform Act also requires that biological, social, and economic data must be utilized to develop these plans (Diaby 1999). These data are necessary to develop management options and to implement management strategies that are appropriate, particularly when management strategies are directed at any species, gear, area or any combination of these (Cheuvront 2002; Diaby 2000, 2002).

A number of studies have been initiated since 1999 in response to the need of socioeconomic information on North Carolina's commercial fisheries (Bianchi 2003;